

R

EA

December, 1987

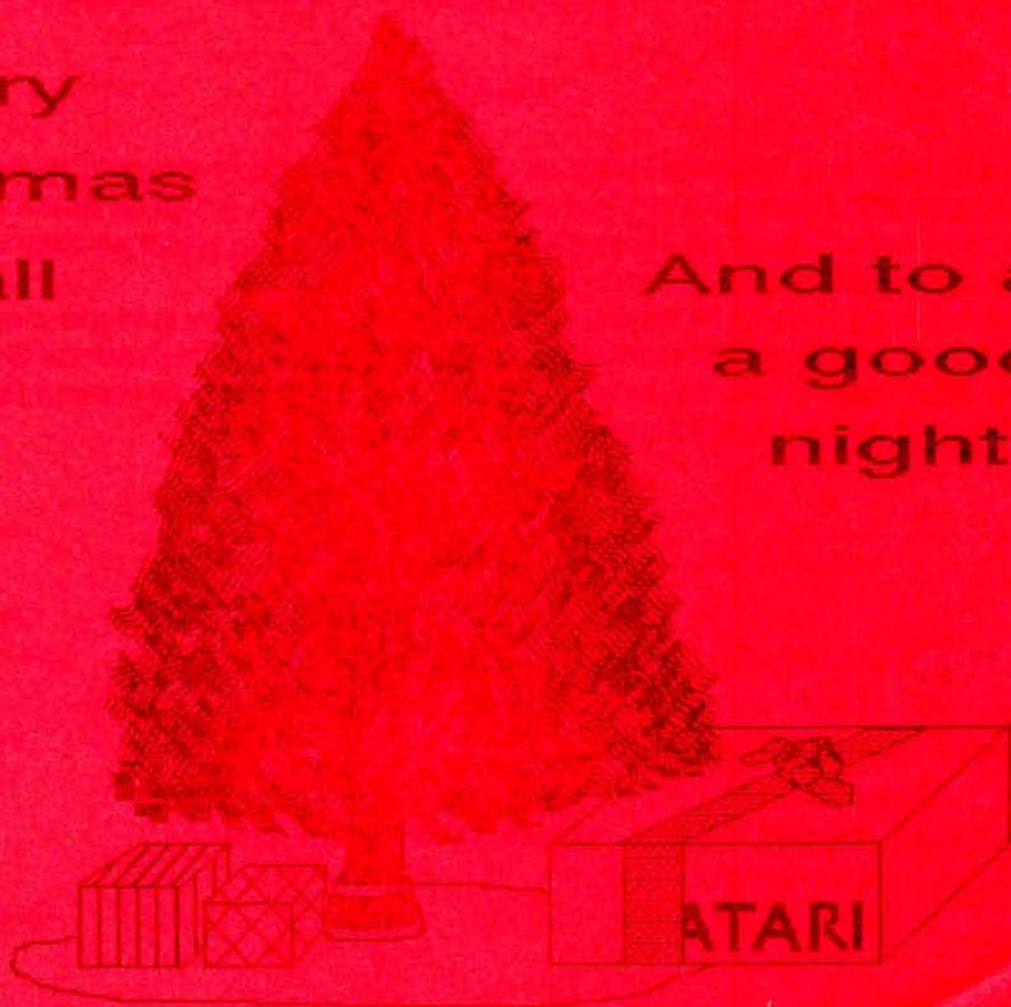
Issue #30

Free

Review of the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists

Merry
Christmas
to all

And to all
a good
night!



E.A.C.H.

E.A.C.H. is an independent non-profit society formed to provide information and support to the *Atari* users of Edmonton and area. The club meets at 7:15 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month in room U116 of the Central Services Building at NAIT. See the map on the inside back cover for details.

Executive of E.A.C.H.

President	Doug Primeau	488-2649
Vice-President	Bruce Cunliff	462-6517
Secretary	David Beale	474-0811
Treasurer	Maurice Hilarius	455-2521
8-bit Public Domain Software Librarian	George Kosowan	465-6691
ST-PC Software Librarian	Kavin Whitman	456-0077
Commercial Software Librarian	Marlowe Shave	450-4025
Education Co-ordinator	Suzal Tam	436-7653
Newsletter Editor	Phil Eckert	477-3671
BBS Admin. (I.M.)	Rick Adzinger	452-2280
The BEACH - Bulletin Board System	24 hours a day	450-1616

Special Interest Groups

8-bit BBS	David Howard	461-1501
ST BBS	Larry-Rose Rozak	462-1526

Memberships

Joining the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists entitles you to complete access to our extensive public domain software libraries (for both 8-bits and ST's), free classified ads in REACH (which will be mailed to you if you miss a mailing), a higher level of access on the club BBS (the EEACH), better prices on disks and printer paper, and discounts on software at Trade and Play and Computer Works.

Membership fees are \$24 a year for the first two months of the year and are thereafter charged at a rate of \$2 for each month remaining in the year. The membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. Students and seniors are charged 1/2 of the regular rates. To join the group, or for more information on becoming a member, call Maurice Hilarius at 455-2521 or write to him at 92 Lorelei Close, Edmonton, AB.

Classified

For sale - 1 RS232C gender changer, female to female, \$10.00
- RUBBER STAMP printer program for Epson-compatible printers \$30.00
- LAIFR-8000 - hardware device including printer & modem interfaces, printer buffer, ability to hook up cheaper (non-Atari) disk drives \$500.00
Call George Kosowan at 465-6691

NEWSLETTER

Articles and inquiries pertaining to this newsletter may be sent to:

REACH
6220 - 111 Ave.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5W 0L3

Permission is granted to any Atari users group or other non-profit organization to reprint original articles found in REACH on condition that credit is given to the author(s) and to the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists.

Ideas and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the editor, the executive, or the membership as a whole.

Published
by
Graveyard
Publishing

"We work for you
The whole night
through"

Castelner Machines
A Specialty

THE LAST WORD

Hello, kiddies! This is the last time I'll be able to address you as Editor of REACH, so savour every moment! Yes, whether you believe it or not, this is the final time - for the foreseeable future. No, my friends, do not give yourselves in to grief or despair - face the future with a light heart! For who knows, you just may get an editor who can (gasp!) mail the newsletters on time!

So. It's been two years... 24 issues of REACH... a time strewn with difficulties and controversies. At the moment, I can't profess to too great an enthusiasm for the last few months especially (staying up all night to finish this #"\$#! newsletter has not exactly made me the happiest of the happy cats today), but ne'er-the-less I must admit that it has been a rewarding experience. I would even venture to say that it is probably the most exciting, most instructive, and most interesting position on the executive. However, it takes a certain minimum quantity of time to do the job well and to enjoy it as it should be enjoyed; and right now, I'm neither doing the job particularly well nor enjoying it a whole lot. Thus I depart, not without some heavy longing in my heart for all that should have been accomplished yet was not, but at the same time I stride forward with renewed strength - because now it's somebody else's mess! Ya-hoo!

Remember, though, that this is not an impossible job by any means - and it is rendered that much more possible, so to speak, by the able assistance of the many able assistants who have ably assisted me with the newsletter. And I'd like to take this moment in the space-time continuum to thank those involved for their help. First of all, thanks are certainly due to Rick Adelsberger and Peter Braun (Blind-Man-Be-Glad-To-See-That, Inc.), and Dave Beale and Bruce Dunlop (Graveyard Publishers), who have all spent many hours of their time running the club's Gestetner machine. Without them, we'd either be paying a lot more to look at these pieces of paper or we wouldn't be looking at them at all.

My thanks also to those writers who have regularly (or at least often) contributed articles... Jeff Lewis, Ian Johnstone, Dave Beale, Jake Ransack, Peter Braun, and a whole bunch of others... I also thank those constant coallaters who have come back for more "round-table discussions" month after month - especially Mike Brown

and Doug Primeau, plus a whole bunch of executive and regular members. You know who you are, folks... and to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter over the last two years, once again, I give you my thanks. It's been a slice.

Some of you may be wondering why part of this newsletter has been processed on an 8-bit instead of the club's 1040ST. Did the club not buy it precisely to use it on the newsletter? Well, yes, and it has been so used. The problem is, again, my lack of time... I haven't been able to go shopping for a 1200 baud modem, so I must rely on the presently-not-so-trusty MPP, which of course does not connect to the ST. So in the interest of saving time (that word again), once I downloaded the articles from the REACH I just processed them on the XE. I wish I had been able to take greater advantage of the ST's power during the time I had it, but... hey, that's life in the big city.

Finally, a comment about articles for this newsletter... would you please consider writing something soon in order to show support for the new editor, whoever he or she may be? I'm sure it would be greatly appreciated... I know that I certainly appreciate it! Every editor, I think, hates to run reprints; I certainly would prefer to print original material. (Because of this preference, by the way, I tend to structure the newsletter around original material, treating reprints as essentially last-minute stopgap items. That is at least one reason why the newsletter may seem to tilt towards the ST (or the 8-bit, I suppose, depending on which specific months you examined) - when the last-minute crunch comes and I need an article NOW, I can try to find an article that will balance the newsletter content for that issue, but if I can't, I'll have to go with whatever fits into the gap. Now, if only there were enough articles of both the 8-bit and the ST orientation submitted... no problems! An editor's dream! Please, make it happen for the new editor! (Or I shall return from the depths, and those who have not written shall truly face my awesome wrath!!!!))

Well, that's about it, then. Keep on smilin', kiddies... I'll be seein' ya. And one last thing... can you say "users' groups are meant to be fun?"

I knew you could! :-)

Phil

BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE

BY JAKE RANSACK

In case you haven't noticed, nothing has been written under this particular byline for some time. Not that you care, but the reason is that I haven't been playing any adventures of late (at least, none I was interested in actually SOLVING).

Since I'm writing here now, one can safely assume that I must have finished at least one, right? So, without further ado... here's a review of THE LURKING HORROR:

THE LURKING HORROR is Infocom's first release with a - you guessed it - horror theme. The game has enough tricky puzzles to satisfy an experienced player, but even a novice 'zorker' should be able to finish it.

In this adventure you are a student at GUE Tech (which stands for George Underwood Edwards, not Great Underground Empire as you may have suspected). You're supposed to be working on a term paper, but fall asleep at your computer terminal and proceed to have a nightmare about mysteriously disappearing students and a horrid being lurking about in the depths of the Institute. Naturally, upon awakening, you forget about finishing the term paper and set about trying to find and destroy the menace... before it gets YOU.

Included in the game package are photos, tips and inside info on G.U.E. Institute of Technology, as well as a student I.D. card. These items will come in handy while trying to solve this game.

Overall, I found Lurking Horror to be pretty enjoyable. Even though it's billed as a horror story, there are several amusing bits in the game (especially when you goof up). There are about three or four 'puzzles' that don't allow any room for error, so I would suggest saving the game frequently if you feel a dangerous situation in the works. And, as always, don't forget to MAP! There is one problem in the game where, if your map is drawn correctly in

reference to the other rooms, the solution will become more obvious.

THE LURKING HORROR is available for Atari XL/XE and the ST machines. Price range: \$35-40.

For those of you already playing the game, I hope you find the following hints helpful (well, I hope they're not TOO helpful):

1. The Hacker
2. In the dark?
3. The Maintenance Man
4. The Peach tree
5. The Pentagrams
6. The Urchin
7. The Rats
8. Can't bring your baggage through the Tomb?
9. The Inner Lair

11. You might try cooking up a deal.
12. Discovering the light can be an uplifting experience.
13. Make him mad, then give him the slip.
14. Dig around and have your stone ready.
15. Think sharp. The timing of your escape is important.
16. Try scare tactics.
17. Don't get steamed - it's all perfectly logical.
18. Plan an alternate route. If you're at the end of the Steam Tunnel the answer is probably over your head.
19. You'll need a helping hand and make sure you're not grounded!

You shouldn't need more help than that, but if you do, you can reach me on the Beach. Have fun playing LURKING HORROR and I'll 'see' you in a future issue... in the meantime remember that you have nothing to fear but fear itself.



ALPHATEL

Computer Products

A Division of ROVELL ENTERPRISES LTD.
16814 - 114 AVENUE, EDMONTON, ALBERTA T5M 3S2
ALPHATEL 452-0025 1-800-661-6983

POWER FOR THE FUTURE.

MEGA ST2

- MC68000 CPU
- Detachable keyboard
- Battery backed-up clock
- Graphics co-processor
- 2 megabytes of RAM
- 192 kilobytes of ROM
- ST software compatible
- Small footprint
- Stackable hard disk (SH205)
- Expansion connector



\$2299.00

WITH MONO

ATARI
POWER WITHOUT THE PRICE

MEGA ST2

NOW IN STOCK!

SALE!

DRAFIX

Full Featured Cad!
Powerful! Easy to use!

\$239.00

WORDPERFECT

The hottest selling word
processor on the market!

\$299.00

Upgrade your
520STFM to
1 meg For
only \$150.00

UNBEATABLE
VALUE!

Upgrades for
520ST's &
1040ST's Also
Available

Atari User Groups Recieve 5% off anything we sell,
Including sale items and memory upgrades!

Page Printers

- by Peter Braun

LASER printers seem to be getting a lot of press in computer journals lately, and with prices dropping steadily, most printer users are probably considering just how far off the day is, when they will also be able to take advantage of this new technology.

As I write this, Atari has already released its new Mega series of computers; they are on the shelf at retail outlets and the companion LASER printers will be available Real Soon Now. They should be for sale by the time you read this. Atari's total package for the desktop publishing market, namely the LASER printer and an ST with the minimum of 2 meg memory that is required to drive it, is about \$5000; while this is very competitive pricing for comparable systems, it is still rather out of reach for most Atari home computer users.

LASER printers are still a relatively new technology; the Apple Laserwriter was introduced a little over two years ago. But there is, on the horizon, an even newer technology which could salvage those of us with limited pocketbooks, and spell the death knell for LASER and most styles of impact printers (only those which were necessary for applications where each strike creates multiple

copies, i.e. NCR forms, might survive).

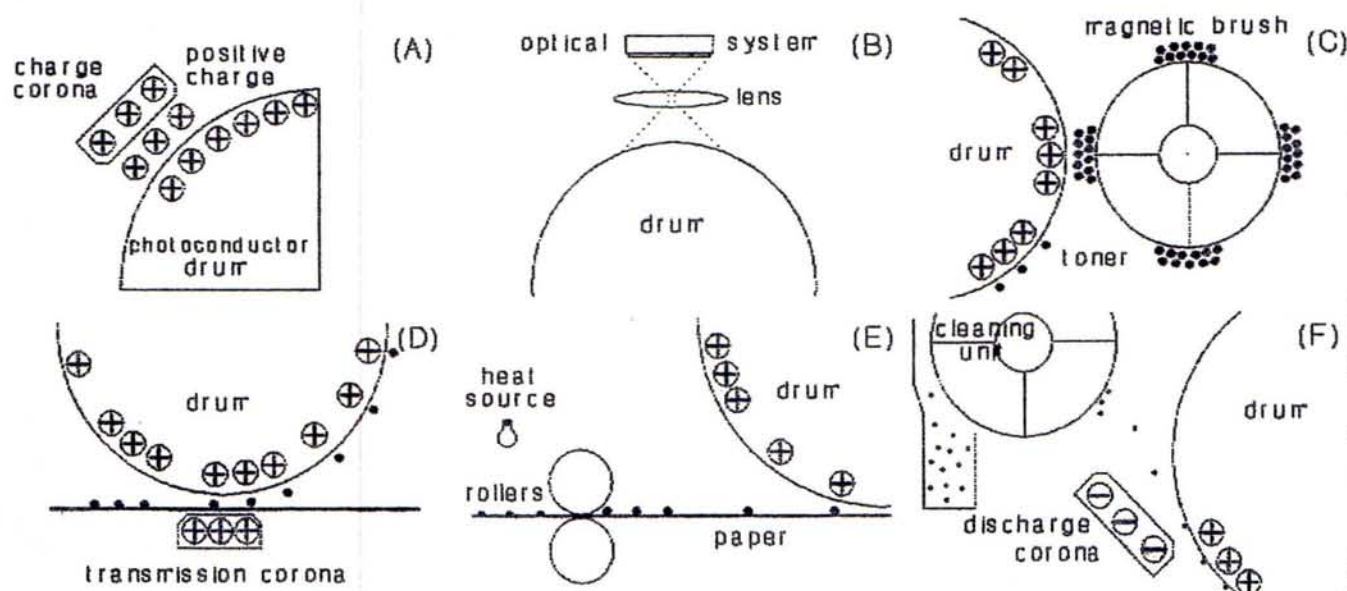
Before you object with "but LASER printers are too well entrenched in the computer high-speed printer market for an upstart new technology to significantly affect things", let me point out two facts:

1. About three years ago ink-jet printers were in much the same position that LASER printers hold today, and there were even predictions that by today's date impact printers would be obsolete. Where are the ink-jets now?

2. The 'new' technology of which I speak isn't really new! It uses the same basic system which LASER printing uses, which is similar to modern photocopiers, but does it more reliably with simpler and less expensive components.

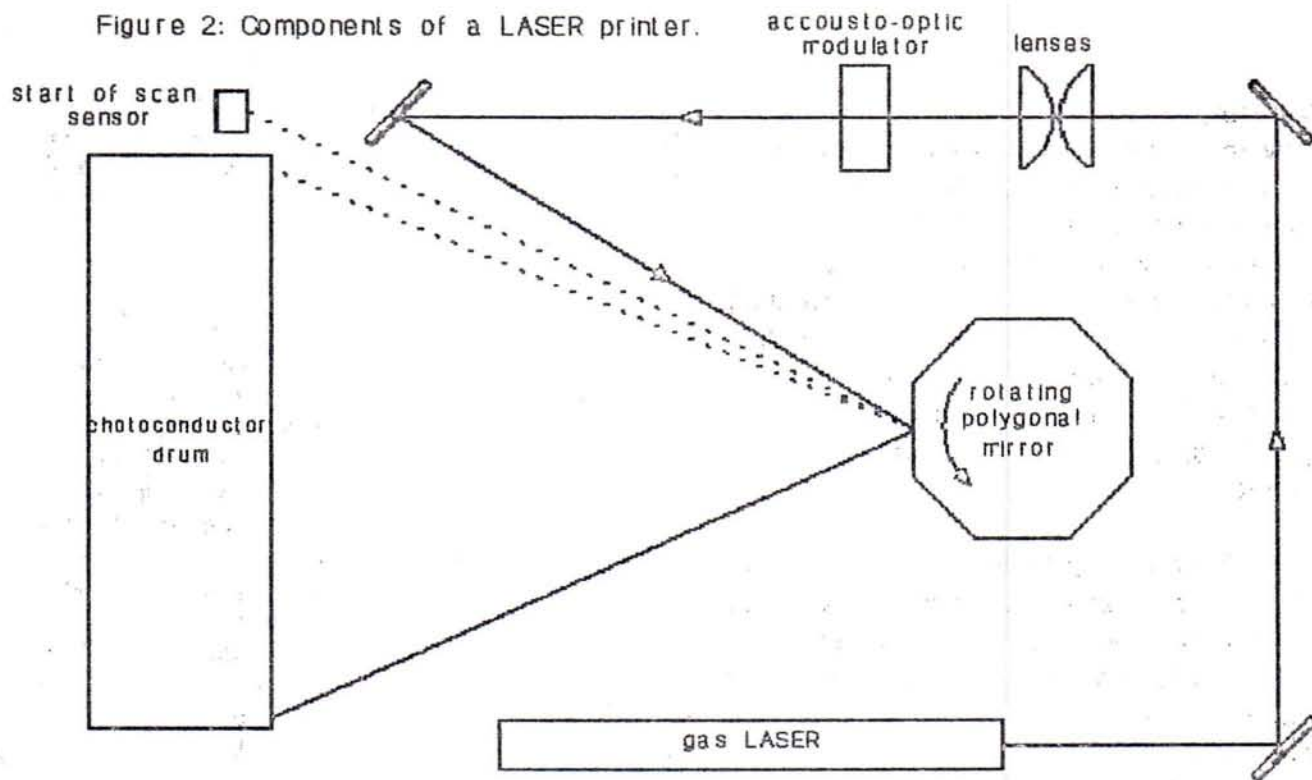
The way that photocopiers and LASER printers produce an image is by using light to selectively remove electrostatic charges in a desired pattern from a special photoconductive metal drum (figure 1B). The drum then goes on to collect the 'toner', actually a plastic compound, which adheres to the drum (figure 1C) according to the electrostatic pattern. The toner is then transferred to ordinary

Figure 1: The six steps involved in page printing



Page Printers

Figure 2: Components of a LASER printer.



paper and made permanent with heat and pressure (figure 1E). The toner is actually melted into the paper. The residual charge and left-over bits of toner are lastly removed (figure 1F) before the process starts again.

Current image writers use a gas LASER to 'write' the background image; that is, it removes the charge from the drum where the toner should not appear. This is accomplished by having the LASER light trace a complex path through lenses and mirrors and an acousto-optic modulator (which turns the light on and off) onto a rotating polygonal mirror which causes the light to scan across the photoconductor.

This technique has several disadvantages. It results in heavy power consumption because the LASERs are generally left on all the time. The fact that gas LASERs typically are rated at 10,000 hours means a lifespan of only a few years. The new Epson LASER printer with a lifespan said to be 80% greater than competitive models is rated at 180,000 pages, a number quite adequate for home use, but rather poor for high-volume, high-speed data

processing and desktop publishing applications. (Solid state LASERs have a longer life, but to date only emit light in the 780-800 nanometer range, which limits the type of photoconductor that can be used). Also, writing the background causes the images to be less sharp.

LASER systems also require a number of moving parts (see figure 2) and components of high precision which increase the cost and reduce the reliability. The key weak link is the rotating polygon. The mirrors must be precisely fabricated, and the rotating components must move consistently in the correct plane. Tiny variations in the surfaces or wobble in the rotating device can produce sag or bow of lines on the paper. Also all movements of the polygon, the photoconductor, and the paper must be carefully synchronized. With the slightest physical abuse and as normal wear occurs, the entire system becomes even less reliable.

The new technology replaces the LASER and the precision mirrors and most moving components with an array of more than 3,500 LED's (Light-Emitting Diodes), or an LCS (Liquid Crystal Switching) array. LCS's are similar to the Liquid

Page Printers

by Jeff Lewis

Crystal Display in your LCD watch, but are actually arrays which can react approximately 200 times faster. The array remains stationary and spans the entire width of the page to be written, and instead of only one line of dots at a time, a whole line (or more) of characters can be imaged, thereby preventing distortion. LED's consume not only less power, 5 to 10 watts compared with 100 to 200 watts for gas LASER printers, but do so at only 5 volts of power, nullifying the double-interlock safety requirement of gas LASERS.

LED's emit light which can be used in photoconductor systems in which the actual image areas are written. For typical text and graphics mixtures, this means a much sharper image and that each LED element will be on for only .026 seconds per 8.5 x 11 inch page, or 7.2 hours for each million pages. Given the 1,000 hour life of the average LED, that adds up to more than 138 million pages, and LED systems are more compact and easier to service than LASER systems.

LCS's use ordinary quartz lamps as the light source and (with the exception of an occasional bulb change) should last even longer, draw less power yet, and be more reliable.

Achieving an array of 3,500+ individually controlled LED's, each small enough for 300x300 dots per square inch resolution (or more: 800x800 dpi have been attained in the laboratory, beginning to rival the 1200x1200 of commercial print), and with a light output variance between elements of plus or minus 10% is somewhat of an engineering feat, but it has already been accomplished by Kodak in their commercially available Ektaprint 1392 printer, a 92 image-per-minute demand printer designed for high-volume, high-speed data processing requirements, with expected pricing of 1/2 to 2/3 of other non-impact electronic printers. It is only a matter of time before home units become available.

> To Boldy Go....

About a year or so ago the face of computing was changed in a way as fundamental as transistor circuitry did nearly 40 years ago. Oddly, not many people even noticed it.

Traditionally, a computer can process one instruction at a time, no more no less. Within a computer, there are several stages through which a given instruction must pass. On some of the more sophisticated processors, they pipeline the instructions so that while the first instruction is in stage two, the next instruction is being processed in stage one, and so on.

However, there is a very clear limit to the speed and power that such techniques can bring to a computer. That limit, while not reached yet, is looming closer and closer. Worse, it becomes increasingly more expensive to get closer to that limit.

So, what to do? Ten years or so ago, while I was still attending university (albeit somewhat erratically) I had come to the realization that the best solution was NOT to keep on building bigger and bigger machines, but to take machines of a good, robust size and link them up so that when one was not in use, it could share it's resources and processing capability with others needing it. Needless to say, I was informed fairly quickly that this idea was already widely known and that there was a rather heated disagreement over which was better: massive centralised processing or wide area distributed processing.

The system I had envisioned was more like a UNIX LAN (local area network, which is a system that interconnects computers in a way that makes all the collective resources available to everyone on the network) but this new development in computing makes that look pathetic.

This new direction came into existence with the development of several inherently parallel processors. The one that is most important to this discussion is the INMos T800-20 Transputer.

The Transputer is an RISC (Reduced

ATARI EXPRESS

Instruction Set Computer) machine. What this means is that unlike the 68000 which has hundreds of instructions in a myriad of optional forms, a RISC has a very small number of simple instructions that can be executed VERY quickly.

In truth, though, the Transputer is not really a RISC. It is a very advanced CPU hidden behind a RISC instruction system. To give you a taste of what all this means, the typical Transputer program has 70% of it's code made up of one byte instructions. Most of them execute in 50 to 100 nanoseconds. This means that a well written piece of code can execute at 10-20 million instructions per second. The 68000 in the ST executes at 500,000 to 2 million instructions per second (MIPS); ergo, the Transputer can execute from 5 to 40 times the speed of the ST.

But that's just the start. The Transputer also comes with a built-in floating point processor that's no slouch either. It can add two double precision numbers in IEEE format (64 bits) in just 1.6 microseconds. The effective maximum rate is 2.25 MFLOPS (million floating point operations per second).

Now, all this is pretty impressive just on it's own, but let's throw in a hardware task scheduling system which can automatically handle several programs running at the same time - and as the final touch, the thing that REALLY makes this machine different, add in an intrinsic network system that allows you to hook as many of these Transputers as you want into a grid shaped network!

Now we have something totally different. In theory, if you have a task that has to be done over and over, you can schedule it to as many of the Transputers as you have that are not currently doing something. Each gets a copy and instructions on what part of the whole task it is to do. Then they all do it all at the same time.

The upswing of this is that the effective speed of the system, taken as a whole can be as great as the number of machines available times the speed of one (10 MIPS) for well organised tasks. Keep in mind that for badly organised tasks, this number can drop as low as the speed

of just one Transputer.

One really nice feature of this system is that if one of the Transputers dies, the system doesn't stop, it just slows down a little. So much for Tandem and their vaunted Non-Stop system.

> So, what has this to do with Atari owners?

Simple. Atari has announced that it plans to produce a new computer called the Abaq (from the root word for Abacus). This little monster comes with four megs of memory and one T800-20 Transputer. It also has slots for up to three cards, each holding up to four more Transputers. With a full set, you can theoretically get up to 130 MIPS/30 MFLOPS.

It will come with a new operating system called Helios and has a graphics system that will simply blow away everything in the market. The lowest resolution is 512x480 in 1.6 MILLION colours. Each pixel can be any colour. The higher resolutions are limited to 256 colours (1024x768 and 640x480x2 screens) or 16 colours in 1280x960. Of course you'll need a high power monitor, and according to rumours, Atari has a plant in the Far East just churning out new low-cost, high res colour screens for this new product.

The price, err, well, US\$4000 is the target price. A lot? Well, for the home market, yes, but then when was the last time you REALLY needed to invert a 6000 by 6000 matrix?

> Laying it on a bit thin...

It seems that Atari is finally starting to make inroads on the business market, but having tried to get a foot in the PC door, they chose to produce (if we ever see them) the traditional IBM-PC clones (and have announced a XT and AT clone, and if rumours turn out to be true, a 80386 based clone of something...) and to keep on top of the Macintosh crowd, Atari seems to have jumped right over the 68020 to the 68030 in announcing that the next generation of ST will be using that chip, which I'm told is 2-5 times faster than the 68020.

Ok... so they've covered the PC-clone market (at least in a vapourware

Computer Works
 'Where the computer works for you'



520ST^{FM}

ATARI
 POWER WITHOUT THE PRICE

New ST Titles:

- Bard's Tale
- Breach
- Beyond Zork
- GFA Basic Book
- Tackle Box
- And *FINALLY*,
 Word Perfect!

NOW IN STOCK!

Atari Users Group Members Recieve 10% Off Regularly Priced Software

Four convenient Edmonton Locations

Londonderry	Kingsway	Southgate	Eaton Centre
472-1051	471-2440	434-1421	424-0336

ATARI EXPRESS

fog), and the Mac market (in an even thinner fog...), and now they have released their off again-on again Laser Printer (at a price that, given their "Power without the Price" slogan, must be able to leap tall buildings at a single bound...), and they even managed to find someone to put together a CD-ROM player that can also be used as a CD audio record player (and this one IS at a reasonable price). They've even managed to come through on their commitment to get Unix (or something very, very much like it called IDRIS by Whitesmiths Ltd) on the ST.

Not bad for one show. Now only one thing left for them to do, or two things actually. First, TELL PEOPLE ABOUT IT!! Sheesh. One of the basic realities of the world is that if you want someone to buy something you're selling is to let them KNOW you are selling it.

Second, DELIVER it. Actually, in truth, Atari really doesn't have THAT bad a record, but it does have that bad a REPUTATION. For example, IDRIS is available (has been for around six months), the K-Max Transputer system from Kuma Inc. is available (not the Abaq, true, but a very close cousin), two different LAN systems (one for IDRIS and one for the basic ST that can talk to AppleTalk and both available right now).

Right there you have 50% of all the products announced available immediately in one form or another. The Laser printer sounds pretty sure as does the CD-ROM player. Only the PC-clones really sound shaky and to be honest, I really don't care about them. We need yet another PC clone maker like we need another really good PC magazine.

> A look to the future...

The next issue should include the colour modulator (yes, it IS coming, so hold on...). After that, we begin several new features here.

First is the beginners' section which will take you from opening up the box, to running applications and beyond (I hope). The second will be a hints and tips section, and in this one I need your help. If you know of some little trick or idea that may help other users, please

send it in, and we'll print it here along with a credit to the person who sent it in. If you've ever wanted to see your name in print, here's a great way to do it.

I still want to keep a LITTLE technical stuff in the column, and of course, we'll try and continue with reviews of commercial and public domain material.

> Ads I'd like to see

From time to time, I may throw in an idea for an Atari ad I'd like to see. For example, one I thought of some time ago has the screen fade in on the corner of a display against a blue background showing what is obviously Lotus 1-2-3. A voiceover says "What home computer can run many IBM-PC programs such as this very popular spreadsheet? <pause> It's not made by IBM..." This then fades to a different corner against a red background which shows the Mac Desktop and the voice says "And can run many of the applications available for the Apple Macintosh, but isn't made by Apple..." Finally, it fades again to a wide shot of the whole ST system running the GEM Desktop and the voiceover says "It can also run 286 CP/M software and of course with it's own large and excellent collection of software..." fade to white then fade to the Atari logo with the "Power with out the Price" line under it... voiceover: "it can just be itself. <pause> The Atari ST... Power without the Price."

Just as an interesting side note, I wonder if anyone has tried running GEM Desktop for the IBM-PC under PC-Ditto yet? GEM under GEM.

Oh yes, one other thought... STOP SHOWING NEOCHROME IN PRESS PICTURES! I hate to break this to Atari, but NeoChrome looks like a kid's toy. Worse, it's ALWAYS showing some silly picture of toy robots just to drive that "toy/game" feel home. This isn't so bad on the 520ST, but on the MegaST? Give me a break. If the Atari moguls would like, I can provide some excellent images of a scientific nature that would be FAR more appropriate for such a picture.

ATARI EXPRESS

> Fonts? It has FONTS????

I've seen an older demo of Microsoft Write for the ST and I can honestly say that it looks good. It's a lot like Microsoft Word 1.0 for the Mac. It supports multiple fonts and such nice features as proportional spacing and real WYSIWYG display.

The original rumours had it that Microsoft was leasing the package to another company which was to port and distribute it for the ST, but the demo I saw had Microsoft as the copyright owners and no one else was listed, and I also have been reading press releases which call it Microsoft Write, which leads me to believe that Microsoft has chosen to support the ST directly.

This is, of course, good news. While I have no love for Microsoft, they are a major player in the computer game and it is good for us to have their support. If only we could get Borland and a few of these others to kick in.

> A neat hack

This little trick come to us by way of Maurice Hilarius, our treasurer. When I saw this one I was quite startled.

If you have a boot disk which you use a lot to run a specific program (or actually up to three specific programs) regularly such as a telecom disk used with Flash or your favourite Telecom program, it can be a real pain to search out that program every time. Worse, as you change files or add files, the program icon will drift about.

Take that disk and open all four windows by double-clicking on the floppy disk icon or single-clicking and using the "Open" item in the File menu. Next, reduce three of these to the smallest size you can and position them tastefully on the screen. Now, go to the "Options" menu and select "Save Desktop". This fixes the layout on bootup.

So far so good, but this really doesn't help much. Now, take a line editor such as Flash's buffer editor, the OSS Pascal Editor or any other editor that will produce normal text (most word processing programs won't work unless you select "text only" or turn off the word processing mode) and load up the

"DESKTOP.INF" file you will find on your boot disk.

In that file you'll find four lines that look something like this:

```
#W 00 00 02 01 4A 0C 08 A:\*. *e
#W 00 00 0D 08 2A 08 08 A:\*. *e
#W 00 00 0E 09 2A 08 08 A:\*. *e
#W 00 00 0F 0A 2A 08 08 A:\*. *e
```

The exact numbers in your will be different depending on where you have decided to place your windows and how large you make them, but the "#W" at the front is the important part as it tells the desktop that these lines show where to put the windows.

Now, using the editor, change the "A:*. *" part to a COMPLETE pathname for the file you usually run. The last line is the window which will be active when boot up is finished, so use that one for the program you use most often. On my telecommunications disk I've set it to look like this:

```
#W 00 00 14 02 10 08 08 A:\ZNDH.TOSE
#W 00 00 26 02 10 08 08 A:\DCFORMAT.PRGE
#W 00 00 38 02 10 08 08 A:\RICHMAN.TOSE
#W 00 00 02 02 10 08 08 A:\FLASH.PRGE
```

If you prefer, by using a wildcard in the filename, you can have a window with files of only a select type (such as "A:*.PRG", which would show only executable programs that use GEM).

Finally, save it and reboot your computer. What you should get are four windows each with a single file in it, the file you specified before. Moreover, the one you defined last will be active, and to run that program all you need do is mouse over to it and double-click! The files on your disk make no difference, as long as the specified file exists on the disk, you will get it alone in that window.

> Wrapping it up for a bit

Well, this HAS been a bit rambling this month. I just wanted to get a few things off my chest before the new format starts. I expect to be ranting somewhat less as I hope to dedicate far more of the column to user help.



Western Data Products Supply

Are other diskette makers cutting more than prices?

Ever wonder why a less expensive diskette is less expensive?

Because it's less diskette.

True, most claim to be "certified 100% error-free," but 100% of what?

Most manufacturers only test 100% of the data tracks on their diskettes. But, unfortunately, they don't test between the tracks.

Dysan, on the other hand, tests 100% of the entire surface area. On every diskette we make.

Why? Because even the tiniest undetected error between tracks can render a diskette incapable of formatting or reading and writing data. And capable of suddenly and irreversibly losing all your data.

Here's another way other manufacturers take shortcuts. To determine the magnetic strength of their diskettes, they follow a standard set by the American National Standards Institute (A.N.S.I.).

But Dysan exceeds that standard by 88%.

Because the stronger a diskette's magnetic signal, the longer it will record and retain your data.

Why don't other diskette makers go to the same extremes that we do? Quite simply, to save time and money.

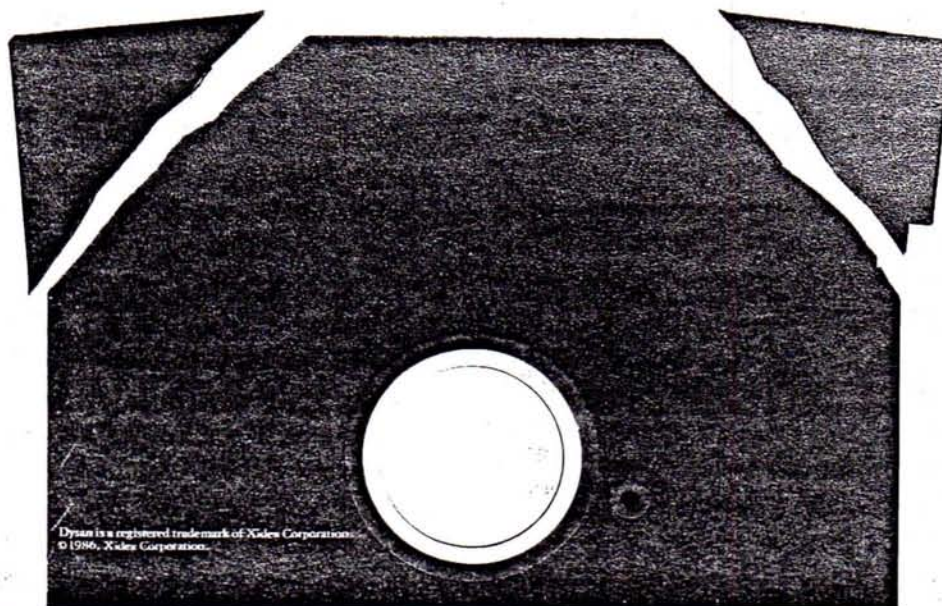
But at Dysan, we think there's something much more important to save. Namely, your data.

Which is why we never cut corners.



Dysan

Somebody has to be better than everybody else.



Western Data Products Supply

COMPUTER SUPPLIES, ACCESSORIES AND ERGONOMIC FURNITURE

Calgary 250-2555

17327 - 107 Avenue

Edmonton 483-1331

Alternate Reality: What A Concept!

by Michael D. Riley

(reprinted with thanks from the November 1987 issue of Bytown Bytes, the newsletter of the National Capital Atari Users' Group)

A Review of THE DUNGEON from DATASOFT / INTELLICREATIONS

You may be one of the fortunate few who played the first game in the series ALTERNATE REALITY and actually survived longer than five minutes. No matter how often I booted the game, I could never come up with enough coppers to buy me a weapon, let alone stay at an inn overnight to recuperate my hit points. As a result, I was usually knocked off by some odd inhabitant of THE CITY before having a chance to really enjoy the game. In fact, the more times I booted up, the more frustrated and angry I got.

So what am I doing delving into a detailed description of THE DUNGEON, you asketh? Well, that's easy to answer: I loved the concept of THE CITY, so the trifling matter of not being able to play it well got pushed way back into the recesses of my own "Dunjinonthenek" when a guy by the name of Muhammed flashed a new shrink-wrapped box in front of my game-hungry eyes. There's a picture on the cover of some obviously mindless adventurer standing in the Portal to a dungeon below the infamous city of Xebec's Demise, with hideous arms reaching out of the shadows to snatch him... the attraction was just too much. (Xebec, by the way, is not a guy OR a gal; you'll find a full definition in most any dictionary.)

Well, let me tell you, THE DUNGEON is worth it. First, a quick description: You've been snatched by aliens and taken to some planet or dimension and dumped to fend for yourself in a world with two suns and a lot of strange people. Most of them are monsters, in fact, out to get you merely for having the gall to be walking the streets in the first place. As in many adventure games, there are numerous places to visit and many items to find that can help you stay alive and even allow you to have some fun while tearing up the town. What's different about the game (as compared to many other role-playing games) are the colourful, 3-D graphics, presented from an eye-level point of view, so that you really get

the feeling you are walking around the place. OK, so you get the idea: kill, get points, get treasure, get weapons, kill, get more stuff, etc., etc.

THE DUNGEON only appears to differ on the surface from THE CITY by having you appear below the surface of the city to play. And, of course, some new monsters are thrown in. But wait! There is more, much, much, more. Let's start with the documentation. The first game established a tradition of using fine scroll paper and flowing script in the preparation of the manual. But that book was maybe six pages of text plus a map. The new manual is over 40 pages long and gives you a detailed description of just about everything you could think of, plus the map AND an artist's rendition of the Dungeon itself (which may or may not be helpful, but is nice to look at). The writing style is clear and breezy, and often lets you know that they're just giving you enough to get started and that there's a lot more to find out for yourself. But one important area that wasn't covered in the original notes, except for one short paragraph, was how much the WAY you play will affect the outcome of the adventure; in truth, every step you take.

In some games you can just stroll about, killing everything that moves, looting as you please, and never paying much attention to moral ethics or any code of virtue. Even in the first three ULTIMA adventures, stealing food was a requirement for staying alive. But unless you sent in your registration card for THE CITY and started receiving Datasoft's Tips newsletter (or sent \$10 for the hint booklet) there was really no way you could be sure how much your personality and character were being monitored by the program. These details are covered quite well in the new docs, thank you. And you'd better be careful if you think you're a nice, decent sort of chap who would never kill an innocent person. Me, I have evil dreams every time I sack out at the Retreat, and I have no idea yet what I did to deserve them. I did, at one point, steal a bag of jewels from Gram's Gold Exchange, just to see what would happen in the Good/Evil side of things. I became fantastically wealthy, but I started having those bad dreams right away. I did not save that character, though, so that's not what did it to me.

Alternate Reality

But onward...

After a short intro to Fantasy Role Playing, and assuring you that you WILL be doing some real role playing, the manual covers in great depth the mechanics of play and the places and items you are likely to uncover in your travels. The Dungeon is four levels and it's fairly big. Some of the locations correspond to areas above in The City, but there are many others that are brand new and quite intriguing. It's extremely important to map in this game, or you'll never find your way around. If you win a battle, chances are you'll find some treasure, be it money, weapons, potions, or magic items. The manual describes the wands, the magic eyes, the weapons and armour, the curses and diseases you might attract, the special magic cards and scrolls you can use for protection and defence, and most of the major retailers and guilds in the Dungeon. A number of the monsters roaming the smelly halls are also described. You'll meet most of them eventually, and by the time you have built up your character's level and stats (stamina, charm, strength, intelligence, skill, wisdom, and hit points) to a fairly reasonable degree, you'll be ready to leave the first level and go down, down, down. (Of course, if you have been able to successfully transfer your CITY character into the DUNGEON, your game will start with a whole different point of view. More on this transferable option later.) Here, you'll find a sequestered "Clothes Horse", whom you can't ride but who will trade some magic items if you happen to be wearing any fancy duds. (Silly me for throwing away my blue suede shoes and black silk kimono.) And the deeper you go, the wilder it gets. All in all, a very nicely done and enjoyable program, with very little of the frustration often experienced in games of this type when you must cover the same ground over and over again to accomplish your goals. There are other reasons the game is so nice to play, and I'll address those now.

The original CITY game was notorious for it's difficult play mechanics. Monster encounters were too random at the beginning, and they were too powerful. You were stuck with the character attributes that are randomly selected for you at the beginning of play. If you wanted a better

character, you had to reboot the game. The program is extremely copy-protected, so loading time was far too long. The game utilizes four disk sides, and every time you entered a shop or special place, you had to wait while the new elements were loaded from disk, and this always seemed to take forever. Further, if you have only one drive, you were doomed to flip those disks back and forth constantly. As if this wasn't enough, new players often died early in the game. Since your character is REMOVED from the character disk when the game starts, you could not "resurrect" him: you had to start a new character, unless you had the foresight to copy your character disk. In any case, this meant rebooting, and going through the whole waiting process all over again. If you were fortunate enough to survive a while and gain some treasure, you could save your character -- but you could not then re-enter the game. You had to reboot once more, and wait, wait again, and the end result was that your character was removed from the disk again anyway. Whatever bugs were in the program also made it almost impossible for me to back up my "saved" character disk using DOS, as the documentation stated. I usually had to use the built-in "elementary copy program" on side 2 of the master game disk, which was indeed elementary. My drive has an enhanced I/O speed with "Ultra-Speed" DOS, which triples the standard copy speed; I could not use this function. And, to top it all off, many users who have modified drives could not run the game without deprogramming their modification. In the case of some of these drives, deprogramming is not possible without removing the hardware, so these people could only hope that the store would refund their CITY purchase. The upshot of all this was that even if you were actually progressing through the game, you were being driven crazy at the same time.

Well, I'm happy to let everyone know that almost all of these problems have been dealt with in THE DUNGEON, and new enhancements have been added to make it even more enjoyable to play. When you spend more time worrying about the mechanics of your equipment than the content of the game, you're on the losing end. Now, most of your time can be spent playing and enjoying this most entertaining

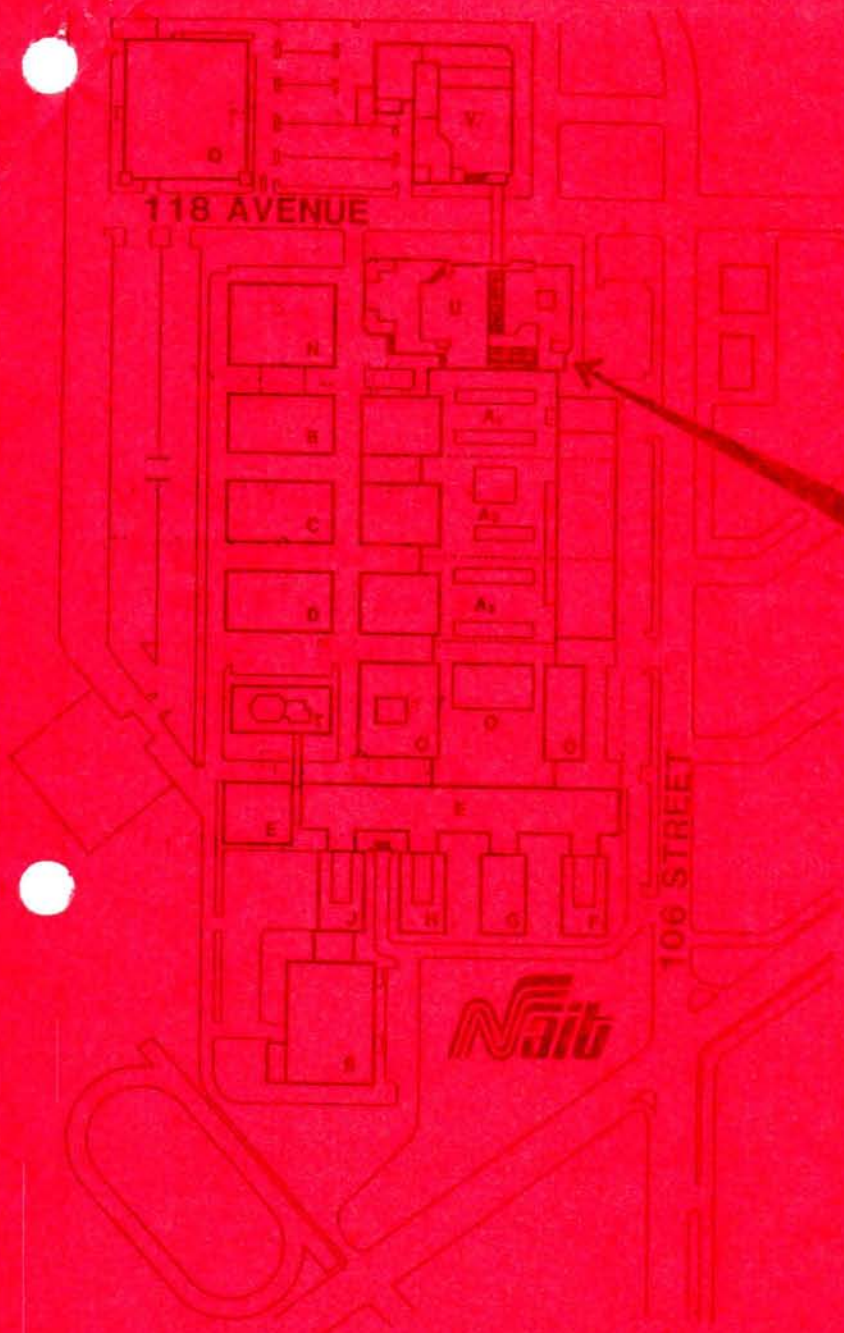
Alternate Reality

of adventures. First, disk access time has been cut considerably. I have a 130XE, and when I boot up, a message flashes indicating that the program is initializing for the 128K system. The programming information has obviously been reorganized to provide much more efficient drive use. It still pays, however, to have two disk drives, as Disk 2 is accessed every time a new situation comes into play. (They've even added the ability to use up to four drives, so you never have to flip a disk.) You must also do some flipping from time to time. Waiting time, though, is shortened considerably. Character stats are still randomly set at the start of the game, but now, if you don't like what you got, you just hit a couple of keys and start all over again. No more re-booting. Also, as you gain points that are worth saving (and that's a lot easier in this game), you simply save to disk and can then resume play, again without having to re-boot. I still find, however, that my own DOS will often not properly copy the character disk when I need a back-up, and that the ponderous built-in copy program is the only reliable alternative. Owners of enhanced drives will still find loading problems, too.

The program is still heavily copy-protected, although this has less effect on loading time for THE DUNGEON than it did for THE CITY. One interesting point to note here is the way the protection works. According to the instructions, you can copy all sides of the three disks except Disk 1, Side 1, for archiving. I always have to ask, though, what do I do if my master disk goes on the fritz? I therefore always try to copy my masters as well. And at first it actually seemed to work with this one. But this is where a unique form of protection comes into play. After loading properly, with title screens and the opening scenario intact, you will always have an "Encounter" (monster meeting) the moment you step into the Dungeon. This particular encounter introduces one or two F.B.I. agents, who will hit you with the "long arm of the law" for more hit points than you have, thereby killing you immediately, and effectively preventing you from playing the game. Kinda dirty, but also kinda neat. But it has produced a problem, and I can't believe DATASOFT / INTELLICREATIONS released this game with a bug

this big. The copy protection works so well that, if you try to transfer a CITY character into the DUNGEON (and building up a character in the CITY for use in the sequels seems to have been the main purpose of that first game), the master program thinks you are trying to use a rip-off copy, and out pops the F.B.I. So all that time you spent working on your stats is wasted here. The customer service people at DATASOFT tell me that this version (2.0) of the game was recalled, to be replaced with a fixed version. But they told me that two months ago, and I have yet to see an updated version in Ottawa. And surely they must have known about the problem. It's not the kind of thing that would have escaped play-testing. So this reviewer has to assume that they released the game before it's time to reap the financial benefits. Phooey on you, DATASOFT, if this is the case. [Note: T. Bird writes in the October Runes (the newsletter of the Midwest Atari Group - Iowa Chapter) that he had the same problem, called up IntelliCreations, sent in his disks, and got a corrected version back in six days. - REACH ed.] Another result of this over-protection is that the game will "long arm" you if your drive is enhanced. One more bug causes the program to lock up occasionally when you try to save your character. I see from the CITY newsletter that Commodore drives were warned to turn their disk drives off and on between each disk swap to prevent this same problem from occurring; somehow the programmers have figured out a way to make us equals with the Atari competition. (I haven't been able to determine if powering down my drive will alleviate this problem, but please, guys, if you're reading this, help us out, will you?) Perhaps DATASOFT's new affiliation with ELECTRONIC ARTS as distributors has something to do with all this mess.

Since I seem to be dwelling on the faults of the program here, let me backtrack a bit and reiterate that the improvements to the game far outweigh the remaining problems. This is an adventure game that is fun to play (it's loaded with magic spells and items that you can really use, and I mean loaded), is full of humour, is extremely well thought out, and will have you wondering about your own morals as a doer of evil deeds before you can shake your magic wand.



ENTRY

TO ROOM U116 IN THE
CENTRAL SERVICES BLDG

EACH meets on the first **TUESDAY**
of each month at 7:15 pm at **N.A.I.T.**

UPCOMING EVENTS

ST SIG Meeting - Dec. 9

The next meeting of the ST Special Interest Group will be held Wednesday, December 9 at 7:00 in room A121 of the Central Services Building at NAIT (see the map on the inside back cover for details).

E.A.C.H. General Meeting - Jan. 5, 1988

A New Year begins! What excitement will it hold for the members of E.A.C.H.? Find out at the January meeting and at all the meetings in the months to come! The first meeting of 1988 will be held Tuesday, Jan. 5 at 7:15 in room U116 of the Central Services Building at NAIT (see the map on the inside back cover). New members are always welcome, and as for you veteran types - don't forget to renew, eh?

For a good
time...

*CALL
the
BEACH!!!*

E.A.C.H.'s own BBS!!
Fire up the modem
and catch some
of those EM
waves. Call:

450-1613

(24 hours a day)

R.E.A.C.H.

6220 - 111 Ave

Edmonton, Alberta

CANADA T5W 0L3